

*An ancient Cave and some ancient Stupas in the District of Gaya.—**By* PARMESHWAR DOYAL.

The District of Gaya is very rich in archæological remains of great interest, and most of them are connected with the rise and spread of Buddhism. Some of these were visited by the Chinese pilgrims in the 5th and 7th centuries of the Christian era, and the identification of the places mentioned in their itineraries with the existing ruins has been one of the chief aims of the researches made by the archæologists of the past century. Almost all the places mentioned by Fa-Hien and Hwen Thsang have been since visited and explored by Major Kittoe, General Cunningham, Dr. Stein and other antiquarians; but one of the most important of them, the Prāgbodhi cave, does not appear to have been visited by any of them, as will appear from the following paragraphs.

In order to make the subject of the present note more clear, extracts from Hwen Thsang's and Fa-Hien's descriptions are given below :—

Fa Hien writes :—

“Thence (*i.e.* from Bakraur) going to the north-east half a yojan, you come to a stone grotto; *Phou sã* entering it and facing the west, sat with his legs crossed and thought within himself ‘in order that I should accomplish the law, I must have a divine testimonial.’ Immediately his shadow depicted itself on the wall; it was three feet high.<sup>1</sup> The weather was clear and brilliant, heaven and earth were both moved, and all the gods in that space explained, it is not in this place that all the Foes past and to come should accomplish the law. To the south-west, a little more than half a yojan is the pei-to tree, where all the Foes, past and to come, should accomplish the law. Having said this, they sang to him and showed him the way retiring.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Legge has translated this sentence thus :—

“On the wall of the rock there appeared immediately the shadow of a Buddha, rather more than 3 feet in length, which is still bright at the present day.”

<sup>2</sup> Fa-Hien's description, abstracted from Major Kittoe's note published on pages 953 to 970 of the Journal of the Asiatic Society for September 1847.

Hwen Thsang says :—

“To the east of the place where Gayā Kāśyapa sacrificed to fire (Gayā), crossing a river, we come to a mountain called Prāgbodhi (Po-lo-ki-pot) *i.e.*, “the mountain leading to (before) perfect intelligence,” as Buddha, when about to attain enlightenment, first ascended this mountain. Tathāgata, after diligently seeking for six years and not yet obtaining supreme wisdom, after this gave up his penance and accepted the rice milk (of Sujātā). As he went to the north-east, he saw this mountain that it was secluded and dark, whereupon he desired to seek enlightenment thereon. Ascending the north-east slope and coming to the top, the earth shook and the mountain quaked, whilst the mountain Deva in terror thus spoke to Bodhisattva: ‘This mountain is not the fortunate spot for attaining supreme wisdom. If here you stop and engage in the Samādhi of diamond (*i.e.*, Vajra-samādhi) the earth will quake and gape, and the mountain be overthrown upon you.’ Then Bodhisattva descended, and half-way down the south-west slope he halted. There backed by the crag and facing a torrent, is a great stone chamber. Here he sat down cross-legged. Again the earth quaked and the mountain shook, and a Deva cried out in space: ‘This is not the place for a Tathāgata to perfect supreme wisdom. From this south-west 14 or 15 li, not far from the place of penance, there is the Pippala (Pi-po-lo) tree, under which is a diamond throne (Vajrāsana, an imperishable throne, supposed to be the centre of the earth, and the spot where all Buddhas arrived at complete wisdom). All the past Buddhas seated on this throne have obtained true enlightenment, and so will those yet to come. Pray then proceed to that spot (Buddha-Gaya).’ Then Buddha departed, the Devas leading the way, and accompanying him to the Bodhi tree. When Asoka Raja came into power, he signalled each spot up and down this mountain, which Bodhisattva had passed, by erecting distinguishing posts and stupas. These, though of different sizes, yet are alike in spiritual manifestations. Sometimes flowers fall on them from heaven, sometimes a bright light illumines the dark valleys. Every year on the day of breaking up the season of Wass (Varṣā), religious laymen from different countries ascend this mountain for the purpose of making religious offerings to the faithful. They stop one night and return. Going south-west about 14 or 15 li one comes to the Bodhi tree.”

General Cunningham in his map of Gaya and Bihar, given in plate III, page 3 of Vol. I of his report on the archæological survey of India, has marked the range of hills about 6 miles south-east of the town of Gaya as “Prāgbodhi mountain” (Po-lo-ki-pot). The statement of Hwen Thsang, that the distance between the stone chamber, situated



in this mountain, and the diamond throne under the Pippala tree (in Buddha Gaya), is 14 or 15 li (*i.e.*, about 3 miles), leaves not the slightest doubt as to the correctness of General Cunningham's identifications.

This range of hills which is washed at its south-western base by the Morā Lake, is called "Morā Tāl Kā Pahār," *i.e.*, the hill of the Morā Lake. The middle part of this range is called Dhongrā Hill, and contains the stone chamber which was probably visited by Hwen T'hsang. The chamber is situated about half-way up the north-western slope of the hill. The cave is excavated at the base of a precipice of rock that rises high above it towards the top of the hill. In front of the cave is a more or less level space about 60 feet long, and 12 or 13 feet wide, which is open on the north-east side where it falls away in the general slope of the hill side. Immediately in front of the cave, however, is a barrier of rock, which completely shuts out the cave from view from below; advantage appears to have been specially taken of the recess thus formed to make the cave where it is. The face of the precipice seems to have been roughly hewn, so as to give it a more regular and vertical appearance; and perhaps the native rock had been further cut to form a level space in front of the cave; but this cannot be stated for certain.

In the entrance to the cave is fitted a *chaukat* (wooden frame), 2 feet 1 inch broad, and 2 feet 4 inches wide.<sup>1</sup> The chamber within is of an irregular oval shape, 16 feet 5 inches from north-east to south-west and 10 feet 9 inches from north-west to south-east. The roof of the cave is vaulted or concave, and is 9 feet 7 inches high at the highest point. The cutting is very rude and uneven, as if the cave had been left unfinished. In the south-western corner of this cave, on a sandstone pedestal, is placed an image of an eight-armed goddess, sitting on a lotus wrought in blue stone. The height of this image including the lotus seat, but excluding the sandstone pedestal (which is only 7 inches high) is 2 feet 2 inches. The face of the image, the top of the halo behind the image, and two out of its eight hands are broken. A few letters of the first and last parts of the Buddhist formula (the rest having disappeared with the broken part of the relievo) inscribed over the shoulders, are in Kutila character, belonging to the 9th or 10th century, A.D., which shows that the image belongs

<sup>1</sup> [The entrance to the cave, which has the shape of a crescent, was at the time of my visit, December, 1901, closed by a masonry wall, erected some 7 years before by the Sadhu, who now lives there. It admitted access to the interior through a small door, formed by a wooden frame, about 4 ft. high and 2 ft. wide. I could not observe any marks of chiselling inside the cave, and I think the cave is a natural one, and not an artificial. T. Bloch.]

to the later Buddhistic faith, though it is now an object of worship for the Hindus of the neighbourhood, passing under the name of Dhongreśvari or Dhongrā Devī.

Below this cave, on the same side of the hill, is a large level terrace about 225 feet square, which contains marks of foundations of buildings. On the same side of the hill, to the north and south of the terrace, are traces of some other ruins.

Ascending the hill from the cave for some distance, in a north-easterly direction, along a passage difficult of ascent, and then turning southwards, the top of the range is reached, on which are situated seven stupas. No. 1 is situated on the top of the precipice exactly above the cave or stone chamber. It is an octagonal mound about 26 feet in diameter, built of brick. Further south, 135 feet from this stupa is stupa No. 2. It is also built of brick, about 26 feet square, but is much mutilated. No. 3 is about 250 feet north-east of No. 1. It is octagonal, about 29 feet in diameter, built of brick with stones in the base. No. 4 is about 610 feet north of No. 3. It is round, 40 feet in diameter and in good preservation. No. 5 is of the same size, situated at about 505 feet north of No. 4. No. 6 is about 110 feet north of No. 5 and is 20 feet in diameter. It is made of brick, and is also in a state of good preservation. No. 7 is about 50 feet north of No. 6. It is a small mound about 18 feet in diameter, built of rough pieces of stone.

These mounds are now called by the villagers of the neighbourhood Dhuni, a word which means the place where the sacred fire of some Rishis or saints was burnt. This idea has probably preserved the mounds from destruction by the villagers; but as the present generation, partly from the growth of materialistic ideas, and partly from the force of necessity, is losing the reverence previously felt towards what tradition held sacred, there is much danger of the the mounds being opened by some inquisitive villager in the hope of finding treasure.

I am inclined to think that these mounds are the stupas erected by Asoka as related by Hwen Thsang, to signalise the spots up and down the hill, sacred to Buddha. As to the position of the stone chamber, Hwen Thsang says, "then Bodhisattva descended," (from some place on the summit of this range signalised by any one of the mounds mentioned above) "and half-way down the south-west slope he halted. There backed by the crag, and facing a torrent is a great stone chamber. Here he sat down cross-legged." Now, as the range lies extended from south-west to north-east, strictly speaking the range has no south-western slope. The stone chamber, however, lies in a south-westerly direction, from many of the stupas now extant, and when Hwen Thsang visited the place, probably some path from stupas Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7



to the cave was pointed out to him as the way Buddha descended, and so he noted the position of the cave as being half-way down the *south-western* slope. The facts (1) that this stone chamber is in a south-westerly direction from the stupas, (2) that it is situated half-way down the slope of the range, (3) that it is backed by a crag, a high precipice of rock on which stands stupa No. 1, (4) that the cave faces the valley between the main range on which the stupas stand and the projecting spur of hill, down which a stream would pour during the rains, (it is probable that Hwen Thsang visited the spot in the rainy season), and (5) that the cave is at a distance of about 14 or 15 li from the Bodhi tree, I think, prove conclusively that the stone chamber mentioned by the pilgrim is no other than the cave.

As to the question of these remains not having been visited by any antiquarian, I would quote below the description given on page 66 of the "List of Ancient Monuments in the Patna Division" revised and corrected up to 31st August 1895:—

"67.—Gaya—Mora Hill Cave.

"This cave is a natural fissure about half-way up the western slope  
"and facing the Phalgu River. It is shaped like a crescent, 37 feet in  
"length and five and a half feet in width, with an entrance in the  
"middle of the convex face 3 feet 2 inches in width, and 4 feet 10  
"inches in height. At the upper or north end there is another opening  
"4 feet broad, and 4 feet high, which gives light to the cave. At the  
"south end the fissure continues for a further distance of 24 feet, but  
"of such small dimensions that a man can only just crawl along it.  
"Its height is 2 feet 7 inches, but its width is only 1 foot 7 inches.  
"At the back or east side of the cavern, there is a ledge of rock  
"8 inches high, which probably served as a pedestal for the shadow of  
"Buddha which was figured in the rock. Every year, at the close of the  
"rainy season, the monks used to climb this hill to make their offerings  
"and to spend a night or two in the cavern."<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation shows that the cave now described by me was not intended, but some natural fissure in some other part of the hill.

As the range extends for several miles and contains many natural fissures along its slopes, different guides may take travellers in

<sup>1</sup> [This description is a literal quotation from Vol. iii, p. 106 of Cunningham's Reports. I have no doubt that Cunningham referred to the very cave described by the Babu in this paper, as the position of his cave agrees with the site of the Babu's cave, but the account given by the late General is very inaccurate. There is, *e. g.*, no 'opening 4 feet broad and 4 feet high' at the upper or north end of the cave, and it is very unlikely that such an entrance existed 30 years ago, when Cunningham visited the place. T. Bloch.]

search of Buddha's cave to different natural fissures. The correct bearing, however, from the town of Gaya, and from Bodh-Gaya, is as follows. On crossing the river the cave Phalgu (which is on the east of the town of Gaya) by the wooden bridge, the road passes due south for about a mile to a bridge near village Bhusandā. Up to this place the road is metalled. After this, it is unmetalled and takes a south-easterly direction. Proceeding along the road, further for about 4 miles, the village Ganjās is reached on the north side of the road. Passing beyond this village a short way off, the road has to be left, and the foot of the hills skirted in a south-westerly direction. Travellers on horse-back or palki may leave the road near the village Manjhowli and reach the cave through village Sahaipur. The above description will be a sufficient guide to any one wishing to visit the cavern. The cave is, however, not visible from the foot of the hill even immediately beneath it, as already explained, but a tamarind tree—the only one there—marks the site.